

United States
Department of
Agriculture



Forest Service



May 2003

Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Elk Bugs and Fuels Project

**Northern Hills Ranger District, Black Hills National Forest
Lawrence and Meade Counties, South Dakota**

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Elk Bugs and Fuels**Draft Environmental Impact Statement****Lawrence and Meade Counties, South Dakota**

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Abstract: The Elk Bugs and Fuels Project is located in the northeastern portion of the Black Hills National Forest in Lawrence and Meade counties, South Dakota. Mountain pine beetle attacks in the Beaver Park area reached an epidemic stage several years ago. Mountain pine beetles have been moving out from the Beaver Park area and have now reached epidemic stages in adjoining areas. P.L. 107-206 was signed on August 2, 2002, allowing immediate treatment of the Beaver Park area as well as a specific amount of treatments in adjoining areas. The Black Hills National Forest has determined that more treatments than those authorized in P.L. 107-206 are necessary in order to reduce the spread of mountain pine beetle populations. Existing vegetative conditions, in addition to dead and dying trees caused by mountain pine beetle attacks, have created conditions making the area susceptible to catastrophic fire events. The Elk Bugs and Fuels Project was developed to reduce the spread of mountain pine beetle populations and to reduce the susceptibility of vegetation to catastrophic fire events. Public review of the Proposed Action during the scoping period identified seven issues. These issues led to the development of four alternatives considered in detail, including no new federal action. Alternative 1, No Action, proposes no additional treatments to reduce the spread of mountain pine beetle populations or to reduce the susceptibility of the project area to potential catastrophic fire events. Alternative 2, the Modified Proposed Action, proposes to create fuel breaks along selected roads and to reduce the basal area in many stands making them less susceptible to mountain pine beetle attacks and more resistant to large catastrophic fire events. Alternative 3, Wildlife Emphasis, changes the configuration of some of the stands to be treated and, where appropriate, thins them to a lower basal area than Alternative 1 in order to provide more grass/forb habitat. Alternative 4, Wildland Urban Interface, adopts a suggestion provided by the Lawrence County Fire Advisory Board. It proposes the same treatments as Alternative 2 and additional treatments near private property where possible. All of the action alternatives propose decommissioning

roads no longer needed for management purposes. The forest Service Preferred Alternative for this Draft Environmental Impact Statement is Alternative 4.

Reviewers should provide the Forest Service with their comments during the review period of the draft environmental impact statement. This will enable the Forest Service to analyze and respond to the comments at one time and to use the information acquired in the preparation of the final environmental impact statement, thus avoiding undue delay in the decision making process. Reviewers have an obligation to structure their participation in the National Environmental Policy Act process so that it is meaningful and alerts the agency to the reviewers' position and contentions. (*Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC*, 435 U.S. 519, 553 (1978)). Environmental objections that could have been raised at the draft stage may be waived if not raised until after completion of the final environmental impact statement. (*City of Angoon v. Hodel* (9th Circuit, 1986)) and (*Wisconsin Heritages, Inc. v. Harris*, 490 F. Supp. 1334, 1338 (E.D. Wis. 1980)). Comments on the draft environmental impact statement should be specific and should address the adequacy of the statement and the merits of the alternatives discussed (40 CFR 1503.3).

Send Comments to: Carl Leland, US Forest Service
US Post Office, Room 201
18 South Mill Avenue
Ridgway, PA 15853

The comment period closes 45 days after the Notice of Availability is published in the Federal Register.

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